



Review of the *Cat Act 2011*

The Department of Local Government,
Industry Regulation and Safety (LGIRS)

Submission of the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

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ava.com.au

About the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The AVA is the peak professional body representing veterinary professionals and students across Australia. For more than 100 years we have been the united voice of the veterinary profession.

Veterinarians are among Australia's most trusted and respected professionals, dedicated to safeguarding animal health and welfare and supporting the communities they live in.

Our vision and purpose

Vision *A thriving veterinary profession*

Purpose *Building a vibrant future for veterinary professionals.*

At the AVA we champion the veterinary community, advance professional excellence, foster connectivity, and deliver exceptional member experiences to achieve our vision of a thriving profession.

Essential role of the veterinary profession

Veterinary services are essential to Australia's animal health, food security, and economy. They help secure Australia's animal health and livestock supply chain, protecting hundreds of thousands of jobs and easing cost of living pressures through a safe and reliable food supply.

Beyond agriculture, veterinarians support companion animals and their owners, strengthening the human-animal bond and promoting the associated mental and physical health benefits of pet ownership. Animals are not just a part of the Australian way of life; they are deeply embedded in it - socially, culturally, environmentally, and economically, and veterinarians are an essential part of every vibrant Australian community.

Veterinarians play a pivotal role in maintaining the social licence of animal industries, ensuring animal health and welfare meets community expectations. Like human healthcare and education, veterinary services provide both private benefits to individuals and critical public benefits to society, in areas like biosecurity surveillance, wildlife treatment and health and emergency animal disease management.

Recognised among Australia's most ethical and trusted professionals, veterinarians are highly respected and trusted members of their communities. The Governance Institute of Australia's 2025 Ethics Index ranked veterinarians among the nation's top 5 ethical occupations¹.

¹ [Governance Institute 2025](#)



Executive Summary

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the *WA Cat Act 2011* (the Cat Act).

The AVA supports a coordinated, nationally harmonised approach to cat management that delivers improved animal welfare, environmental protection and community outcomes. The AVA has made 9 recommendations that will improve the effectiveness of the Cat Act, including that:

- The definitions of the four distinct cat populations in Australia based on their interaction with humans (Owned, Semi-Owned, Unowned and Feral) are adopted in the legislation.
- Cat sterilisation (desexing) occurs before four months of age, unless a registered veterinarian exempts an individual cat due to determining that desexing at that age is not in the best interests of the cat.
- Clear outcome focused objectives that encourage responsible cat ownership, which is supported by stakeholder engagement, education and guidance, targeted support, research and evidence-based behaviour change.
- Funds obtained through cat registration contribute to programs supporting research, review and evaluation, population and welfare management, education and targeted support.
- Alternative approaches are explored that prioritise responsible cat management, prior to justice system involvement.
- Microchip implanters are required to undertake the activity under the general supervision (as defined by the *WA Veterinary Practice Regulations 2022*) of a registered veterinarian.
- Registration and inspections of breeders become a requirement of the legislation, including new definitions and approaches for intentional and unintended breeders.
- Consideration should be given to incorporating innovative population assessment tools, including alignment with the One Welfare Framework.

Question responses

Question 1. Which of the following best describes your reason for providing feedback?

The AVA has a dedicated WA Division, which focuses on state-based issues and its committee membership solely comprises WA veterinarians.

Veterinarians are among Australia's most trusted and respected professionals, dedicated to safeguarding animal health and welfare and supporting the communities they live in. The *Cat Act 2011* (the Cat Act) will have direct implications for veterinarians in WA.



Registration, microchipping and identification

Question 2. Should any of these requirements change? If yes, what changes would you suggest and why?

The AVA supports nationally consistent approaches to cat identification and management, acknowledging that these must be appropriately tailored to meet the specific requirements of local areas. Registration may assist governments to understand cat populations and support policy planning where it aligns with harmonised national systems. However, registration alone does not improve outcomes unless it is integrated with effective enforcement, education, containment and desexing, and welfare-focused programs.

Microchipping remains the most direct tool for reuniting cats with owners. Any system should prioritise outcomes rather than administrative burden and avoid unintended consequences for cat welfare or veterinary practices.

The AVA recommends that the funds obtained through cat registration should contribute to programs supporting; research, review and evaluation, population and welfare management, and education.

Recommendation 01: That the funds obtained through cat registration should contribute to programs supporting; research, review and evaluation, population and welfare management, and education.

The AVA notes the penalties that are established under the Cat Act and proposes that the legislation should have flexibility to ensure that the key outcomes are prioritised (namely encouraging the responsible ownership of cats), instead of / or in addition to penalties. For example, an elderly person without the means to microchip their cat, should not be put in a position where a court order is required to microchip their cat. The legislation should consider alternative approaches, prior to a court order, for the cat to be microchipped, and thus meet the intent of the legislation.

Recommendation 02: That the WA Government explores alternative approaches, prior to a court order that prioritises the key aim of responsible cat management (microchipping and desexing) rather than requiring a court order through the justice system for this to occur.

The AVA recommends that the implanter of microchips should preferably be a veterinarian, because of the knowledge of aseptic technique and anatomy required. The accountability of registered veterinarians fosters accuracy, confidentiality and expertise in record keeping.

As the Cat Act permits implantation by non-veterinarians, this should only be permitted after a suitable training course and is recommended to occur under the supervision of a registered veterinarian. It is recommended that the Cat Act make clear that a microchip implanter is required to undertake the activity under the supervision of a registered veterinarian.

The *WA Veterinary Practice Regulations 2022* expressly distinguish between personal supervision, direct supervision and general supervision, with different obligations attaching to each level.

For microchipping, the AVA recommends that general supervision to be the most appropriate model once the person undertaking microchipping has completed an appropriate competency-based training program.



In practical terms, this would allow appropriately trained council officers, rangers and other authorised personnel to undertake microchipping without requiring a veterinarian to be physically present for every procedure, while retaining an appropriate veterinary governance framework.

Recommendation 03: That the Cat Act be updated to make clear that a microchip implanter is required to undertake the activity under the general supervision (as defined by the WA Veterinary Practice Regulations 2022) of a registered veterinarian.

Sterilisation

Question 3. Should the sterilisation requirements change? If yes, what changes would you suggest and why?

Under the Cat Act, cats are to be sterilised by the time they are six months of age (unless they are exempt).

Current scientific evidence recommends that prepubertal sterilisation (desexing), before 16 weeks, is particularly important in cats,¹ which may be able to reproduce from 4 months of age. At the veterinary practitioner's discretion, desexing of cats can be performed from as early as 8 weeks of age and at 1kg bodyweight. Current scientific evidence strongly supports desexing cats before puberty and finds that this does not increase the risk of short-term complications or long-term health effects.²

The AVA notes the veterinarians have the right to clinical discretion and to exempt cats from desexing if there are risks to the animals health. This capacity for veterinarians to exempt cats is strongly supported and should stay in the legislation.

Recommendation 04: That the WA Government update the Cat Act to reflect cats must be desexed before four months of age, unless a registered veterinarian exempts an individual cat due to determining that desexing at that age is not in the best interests of the cat.

A 2021 RSPCA report³ found that despite the evidence recommending prepubertal sterilisation that the majority of veterinary clinics do not routinely desex cats before puberty, which is due to a range of factors, such as a lack of experience and training with the undertaking the procedure on prepubertal cats.

Due to this, the AVA recommends that if the legislation is updated to incorporate desexing before four months of age, that education occurs with the veterinary profession with WA about the changes and the evidence supporting prepubertal sterilisation, which also aligns with recommendations 1 and 7 of this submission.

Recommendation 05: That the WA Government invest in education with the veterinary profession about the legislative changes and the evidence supporting sterilisation before four months of age.

¹ Mazeau Loic, Wylie Claire, Boland Larc and Beatty Julia A. (2021) A Shift Towards Early Age Desexing of Cats under Veterinary Care in Australia. Scientific Reports 11, Article number 811

² RSPCA Australia Prepubertal Desexing Research Report June 2021. <https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2021-06-Pre-Pubertal-Desexing-Report.pdf>

³ ibid



Breeding

Question 4. Should any aspects of the breeding approval requirements under the Cat Act change? If yes, what changes would you suggest and why?

Where companion animals such as cats are bred, the conditions must meet the physical, behavioural and social needs of the breeding animals and their offspring.

The AVA supports the Cat Act making clear that breeders will not be able to be approved if the applicant has an insufficient or unsuitable facility / premises to breed cats in a safe and ethical way.

The Cat Act outlines that a local government is required to provide a certificate to an approved cat breeder. However, it does not make requirements on the local government to keep a register of cat breeders. Under Section 12 (1) A local government is required to keep an accurate and up-to-date register of cats registered by the local government. Despite this, there is no requirement for registration to occur with breeders, meaning that there is potential that cat breeders are not registered, identifiable or traceable, depending on the local government. There is also no requirement for inspections of breeding facilities / premises. Breeders must be licensed, identifiable and traceable and independently inspected. It is noted that under Section 80 (3j) local governments can put local laws in place on the registration, regulation and inspection of breeders, but it is not a requirement. It is not expected that the transition from a certificate model to a registration model will impose additional requirements on breeders, but specifically on local governments to keep an active register.

If the WA Government were to require registration and identification of cat breeders, it should make distinction between intentional breeding and other 'unintended' types of breeding that can occur, including:

- accidental litters from owned cats;
- semi-owned cats;
- unowned or stray cats that give birth on someone's property; and
- rescue and foster situations.

The rationale behind this is to differentiate those circumstances where 'unintended' breeding occurs and to encourage the prompt notification of governments so that the queen and the kittens are desexed, registered and microchipped. To further encourage this, a person should be able to be granted a temporary breeding status, with a simpler process than a breeding registration. In unintended breeding situations, the person can be a seller under Section 22 of the Act and will have the same requirements under Division 4 (related to microchipping, desexing and registration). The relevant person and the notified local government of the unintended breeding scenario should work together to ensure the registration, microchipping and desexing of the queen, avoiding a scenario whereby cost is the sole impediment to these activities occurring.

Recommendation 06: That the WA Government update the Cat Act to make clear that registration and identification of cat breeders is required by local governments, including stipulating the need for inspections of breeders' facilities / premises. To do this, the Cat Act will differentiate between intentional breeding and unintended types of breeding.



Enforcement

Question 5. Do you have any suggestions to improve cat owners' compliance and local governments' enforcement of the Cat Act? If so, what are they?

Having clear outcome focused objectives that are reported transparently would support compliance and enforcement activities, by providing a clear purpose for these activities. Currently the Cat Act aims to:

- provide for the control and management of cats; and
- promote and encourage the responsible ownership of cats, and for related matters.

Unfortunately, based on these aims it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the Cat Act.

The Cat Act requires greater elaboration on why it is seeking to control and manage cats, including what are the specific aims of the legislation. Cat management should have clear outcomes-based objectives based on the mitigation of documented negative impacts associated with cats. For example, the outcomes-based objectives could include positive response of the wildlife population, reduced incidence of zoonotic disease and decreased nuisance complaints.

The Cat Act should include greater information around how it aims to promote and encourage the responsible ownership of cats. Currently the Cat Act focuses on registration, breeding and sterilisation, providing broad parameters where local governments can make laws, but it does not cover:

- Stakeholder engagement and collaboration to support effective management of the cat population.
- Education and guidance. Education programs incorporating veterinary input combined with guidance on enrichment and containment are key factors in improving responsible ownership.
- How research and evidence-based behaviour change will be incorporated into the legislation.
- Targeted support for vulnerable communities.

Recommendation 07: That the Cat Act be updated to provide clear outcome focused objectives and encourage responsible cat ownership, supported by stakeholder engagement, education and guidance, targeted support, research and evidence-based behaviour change. These actions will improve cat owner compliance, through having a greater understanding of what responsible cat ownership looks like.

Additional suggestions

Question 6. Do you have any additional suggestions to improve the Cat Act or its administration?

The AVA strongly encourages the *Cat Act 2011* to adopt the definitions of the four distinct cat populations in Australia based on their interaction with humans. It is noted that although the four populations overlap to varying extents, each requires a distinct management strategy. These populations are:

- Owned - these are cats who live in a domestic household, are usually named, have a form of identification, depend on humans for their food.



- Owned cats are the primary focus of the *Cat Act 2011*.
- Semi-owned and Unowned – Semi-owned and unowned cats or their antecedents were once owned by people. Their or their antecedents' origins were as abandoned, wandering or lost owned cats. Semi-owned and unowned cats are variably dependent on humans for food and shelter. They are more abundant in areas where food resources are available. Semi-owned cats are fed intentionally by well-meaning members of the public who do not perceive ownership for the cat. Unowned cats are not intentionally fed but are at least partly dependent on food from humans, for example, by scavenging from human rubbish.
 - Semi-owned and unowned cats should be incorporated and defined in the *Cat Act 2011*, with the legislation updated to take account of these populations.
- Feral - these cats live independently of humans.
 - Feral cats should be defined in the Act, because it already includes references to feral cats, but the term is not defined.

Recommendation 08: That the Cat Act be updated to adopt the definitions of the four distinct cat populations in Australia based on their interaction with humans (Owned, Semi-Owned- Unowned and Feral) and incorporate it into the legislation, including management techniques.

7. Are there initiatives in other jurisdictions that have been successful in cat management that could be considered in WA?

The AVA supports a coordinated, nationally harmonised approach to cat management that delivers improved animal welfare, environmental protection and community outcomes.

Effective solutions require coordinated, whole-of-community approaches, including desexing programs, education, veterinary involvement and clear assignment of responsibility to governments rather than individual carers.

It is imperative to recognise that managing cat populations themselves are the symptom – there is a need to identify root causes (e.g. overpopulation/abandonment, etc.) for sustainable management programs.

Consideration should be given to incorporating innovative population assessment tools to support the collection of more accurate, reliable, and verifiable data on cat populations. Improved data quality will strengthen the design, targeting, and evaluation of cat population management programs, enabling more effective and evidence-based outcomes.

Cat colony management should be humane, strategic and evidence-based, recognising distinct cat populations and their differing welfare needs. The AVA supports approaches where veterinary expertise is embedded in planning and delivery and are aligned with a One Welfare framework - where the interconnectedness of cats, humans and the environment is recognised and applied to understand impacts and solutions to mitigate these impacts.

Recommendation 09: Consideration is given to incorporating innovative population assessment tools to support the collection of more accurate, reliable, and verifiable data on cat populations and aligned with the One Welfare Framework.



Contact

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Appendix – relevant AVA Policies:

[Management of cats in Australia](#)

[Control of native and introduced animals causing damage to agriculture or habitat](#)

[The responsible ownership of dogs and cats and the human-animal bond](#)

[Surgical sterilisation of dogs and cats](#)

[Electronic identification of animals](#)

[AVA Statement of principles – animal welfare and ethics](#)

[Considering welfare of target and non-target animals in planning vertebrate control programs](#)